

A guide to our policy on ...



doing your own home improvements



BARNSBURY
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

We want you all to feel proud of your home, to enjoy how it looks and feel comfortable living there. You are responsible for decorating and furnishing your home but what if you want to change more than the colour scheme? We don't allow some changes and some works can only be done if you have been given our written permission. So before you start any improvements or changes please read this policy.

1 Why we have this policy

- * **Safety:** your health and safety and that of visitors and other people in neighbouring homes.
- * **Saving you time, money and effort:** to avoid you spending money and energy on works and materials we later have to change or take down completely for safety or for other reasons.
- * **The law:** some works can only be done by certified specialists and some can only be done with official approval and/or with particular building materials.
- * **Keeping a cap on our running costs:** to avoid our running up unnecessary bills which you and your neighbours end up paying for.

2 Home improvements: what you can do and how, and what you can't do

On page 3 you will find a list of the sort of **works you cannot do without first getting our written permission** and examples of those we might let you do.

Some types of work can only be done by a properly **qualified and registered professional** (see 4 on page 2), so before you ask us for permission to go ahead with

the work you will need costs and a detailed breakdown of what the contractor is going to do for you.

Some works may also need planning or building regulation consent from Islington Council. Again please check with the council before you come to us (see 4 on page 2).

What the law says about this policy

The Housing Act 1985 says those of you with a secure tenancy can alter and/or improve your home if you have written consent from us, your landlord. If your tenancy started sometime in the last 30 years you most likely have an assured tenancy. You don't have this same right in law but we think you should both have equal rights so we let you do the same. This right is not on offer to key workers or those of you on a starter tenancy.

Who we consulted over this policy

We asked members of our resident panel for their views. They said, and we agreed, no one should have to apply for permission for works done before the policy was agreed. But they also agreed if we found any home improvements already done were a safety risk then the tenant responsible should be charged for work needed to make the property safe again.

This policy was approved by our board of management on March 2021.

3 Improvement works that will first need our written permission

These are some, but not all, of the works that cannot be done without your first getting a letter from us saying we permit you to do them.

Works that need our written permission before you can do them include **putting up, taking out, taking down or installing:**

- * walls, windows, doors and/or floors
- * electrical sockets, switches, lights *etc*

- * central heating (boiler and or radiators) and/or fireplaces
- * kitchen cupboards, work surfaces, sinks *etc*
- * bathroom suites/cupboards and or showers
- * water meter
- * satellite dish and/or TV aerial
- * garage/s, shed/s, greenhouse/s and outhouse/s.

If you are in any doubt whether your home improvement needs written permission please ask.

4 Getting your works done to a professional standard

PROFESSIONAL CONTRACTORS

Most of these works must be done by properly **qualified professional contractors**. That includes any works involving gas, electricity, most types of plumbing or work that might affect the structure of the building.

We will need you to tell us who you will get to do the work and how they are qualified. We will need to see an estimate from the contractor that specifies exactly what they will do. We may also need to see illustrations or plans of the work you want to do.

BUILDING REGULATIONS AND PLANNING CONSENT

For some changes you may need written consent from **Islington Council's building control or planning officers**.

Before you ask us for permission to do the works please contact building control and/or the planning department at Islington Council to ask if this applies to your plans.

We will need to see all documents the council sends you (the originals, not copies) before we can approve your works.

“ After taking off the sub-floor, we found the floor joists had been cut and notched to hide the plumbing pipes. This had weakened the joists.

When improvements go wrong, page 4

GAS AND ELECTRICITY: SAFETY INSPECTION CERTIFICATE

After having any work done that affects your gas supply or electricity you will need to get a **safety inspection** done. We will need to see the inspector's (original) inspection certificate.

ASBESTOS CHECK

Asbestos was widely used in homes until the health risks were officially recognised. It may still be present in some homes and, if left undisturbed, is safe. If we think your works might risk disturbing something containing asbestos we may need to get your home surveyed. We pay for the survey.

ANY DAMAGE CAUSED DURING YOUR WORKS

If any other parts of our property are damaged during or because of your improvement works you will have to pay for the damage to be made good.

WHY MIGHT WE REFUSE PERMISSION FOR YOUR WORKS?

We won't say no without good reason. If we say no and you think we might approve your works with some tweaks you can reapply to us for permission a second time.

Replacing bathrooms and kitchens

When we replace older kitchens we give you a choice from a range of modern units, worktops, tiles and floor coverings. With bathrooms too you can pick your fittings, taps and flooring from good quality ranges. And we ask for your ideas and preferences on matters like design and layout. The ranges we offer are a cut above the government's 'Decent Homes Standard'.

If you would rather pay for and fit your own kitchen or bathroom you will need our written consent. You must use properly qualified fitters and installers and we may need to see plans or illustrations of the design and/or fittings.

5 Who will pay for future repairs and maintenance of your works?

We will do any work needed in future to the improvements you've made so long as it does **not cost more** than we would normally spend on this sort of repair.

If you have used materials that will need specialist attention or replacing them will be costly or difficult we cannot guarantee we will replace like with like.

If the cost of future repairs is likely to be high we may ask you to sign a waiver agreeing that you will pay for all maintenance until the improvements you've made might reasonably need replacing or upgrading.

6 Works we will *not* let you do

We will say no to any works that:

- * we think would **undermine or harm** the **property's structure**
- * might **push up maintenance costs**, now or longer term
- * will **make the property unsafe**
- * will lead to **less living space** in your home
- * might lead to a **drop in the property's value**
- * would **breach planning or building regulations** or any other relevant laws
- * would have a **damaging or harmful environmental impact** on the area around your home
- * would affect the **health and safety** of other people living in or visiting the property or neighbouring homes
- * would **slow down, halt or get in the way of works** which we have planned.

7 Works we might approve, but only with strict conditions attached

ELECTRICAL AND PLUMBING ALTERATIONS

As a general rule we won't let you take out or change any pipework, electrical wiring or other basic fittings.

We will let you make minor electrical changes, like installing an extra single light fitting or a power socket. The work must be done by a qualified electrician and you must get a safety certificate to show the work was done properly.

LAMINATED FLOORING

Laminated floors can make noise from your home a serious problem for your immediate neighbours. They can also make it hard for our repairs contractors to get to pipes to sort out leaks, for example.

If you want to lay laminate flooring ask us first. We will treat each case on its own merits.

“ We found five appliances plugged into an extension cable hidden behind plaster-board... it might easily have caught fire.

When improvements go wrong, page 4

Examples of works you cannot do

We will never approve your:

- * changing the layout by **adding or moving walls**
- * changing **how rooms are used**, for example switching around the kitchen and bathroom
- * adding an **extension, a conservatory or a lean-to** structure
- * replacing **complete sets of windows or any doors that lead outside**
- * replacing or taking off **internal 'fire-safety' doors** that protect the rest of your home from the kitchen or a kitchen/lounge area.
- * fitting **security bars on windows or doors** as they make escaping very difficult if a fire breaks out
- * fitting **spotlights** in your ceilings if you live in an **older-style building** that was not designed to have modern lighting systems.
- * removing **chimney breasts**.

8 Work standards and timetable

We expect you to complete any works we permit to the **standards** and **timetable** agreed by us. If you don't do this we have the right to

tell you to return the property back to the way it was before any works started. We can order this at any point while you remain our tenant.

9 Inspecting the finished work

If we permitted your works but, on inspecting the finished project, find they were **done to a poor standard** or **ignored conditions we set**, we will give you a deadline for getting more work done to a quality we judge acceptable.

If at any time we find a **serious case** of works you have done yourself or had done that:

- * pose a **serious risk to the safety of the building** or to **anyone living in or near or visiting the property** and/or
- * that is **entirely out of keeping with the structure, style and fabric** of the building

then we will ourselves call in contractors to carry out the work needed to put matters right. **You will be liable for all our costs.**

10 Legal action on safety grounds

This is a last resort and we very much hope it would never come to this. However, if we have warned you that we need to carry out

badly needed safety works and you refuse to let our contractors in to do the work we will take legal action so they can.

When 'improvements' go wrong 1

In one recently vacated flat we found a beautiful new bathroom, installed by the last tenant. On the floor below the tenant had taken out a wall to make the living room open plan. The bathroom floor had a noticeable dip and the porcelain tiles had cracked. Taking off the sub-floor, we found the floor joists had been cut and notched to hide plumbing pipes, weakening the joists. The wall taken out downstairs had been loadbearing. **Loadbearing walls and floor and ceiling joists hold up the building.** Precise drilling and cutting patterns must be followed. If your renovation involves cutting through any structural section you must first get permission.

When 'improvements' go wrong 2

We inspected a flat where a tenant had reported problems with electrical devices shorting out over and over. We found more than five appliances plugged into an extension cable hidden behind plasterboard and plugged into a single socket, overloading the circuit. **Luckily the right type of circuit breaker had been installed so the circuit tripped or it might easily have caught fire.** Do not do your own electrical work. Always use a licensed electrician.

11 Your questions, our answers

WHAT IF I HAVE DONE SOME WORKS ALREADY?

If you had works done before we adopted our policy (March 2021) you do not have to tell us or apply for back-dated permission but it might help. **If we see on a visit to your home that you've done works we would not have approved because they are not safe our policy will apply** (see 9, left). We will discuss with you the work needed to make your home safe. We may ask you to get it done or, if it has to be done urgently, may organise it ourselves.

DO I NEED PERMISSION TO DECORATE MY FLAT, OR PUT UP A BOOKSHELF OR CURTAIN RAIL?

No. We expect you to do the work to a reasonable standard but minor works like these are fine. Take care not to drill or hammer through wires or pipes. If you're not sure where these are we are happy to advise. **If you are not sure whether or not the work you want to do needs our written permission, please ask.**

WILL YOU PAY ME COMPENSATION FOR THE WORK I'VE DONE?

We might do so if and when you move out if you did the works with our written permission. Please don't assume we will or that we and you will agree their worth. We follow a formula set by government regulations* to work out how much we will pay and what we will pay for. You will need to produce receipts and/or other documents to prove the cost of the works. **We only pay compensation for work done with our written permission.**

* Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 1994